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ABSTRACT

The relationship between the perceptual organization of junior college instructors and student ratings of their effectiveness as teachers is explored. The major hypothesis of the research was that there would be a significant positive relationship between student ratings of faculty effectiveness and certain aspects of perceptual organization. The subjects were 32 junior college instructors. Two student ratings were administered to students of all the instructors participating in the study. The first instrument was the Purdue Instructor Performance Indicator (PIPI), a forced-choice rating scale in which the student is required to make a series of choices from blocks of descriptive behavioral items. The second instrument was a self-anchoring scale of teacher effectiveness called the Teacher Rating Scale (TRS). Multiple stepwise regression correlations computed between the six perceptual dimensions using ratings inferred from TAT protocols and PIPI student ratings indicates that four of the dimensions produced a multiple R of .70 and accounted for 49 percent of the variation found in the criterion. In specific terms of teaching excellence at the junior college level, effective teaching becomes a matter of working through the environment, in essence, providing the student with greater freedom to explore and discover his maximum potential. (CK)

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEPTUAL CHARACTERISTICS AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING AT THE JUNIOR COLLEGE LEVEL

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INTRODUCTION

The community junior college is the most rapidly growing and perhaps the most dynamic unit in American education. It came into existence because the traditional college and university could not meet the needs of a greater variety of students. The philosophy of the community junior college rests on the assumption that the United States is an open society in which every person can aspire to and have some reasonable degree of hope of achieving additional educational training and opportunity. The student body is supposed to be representative of the total population: all social classes, all interests, all ability levels, and all ages. The distinct challenge of teaching at the junior college rests with meeting the needs of professional-preparatory students as well as vocational students, high ability students as well as low achievers, young adolescents as well as students in their forties and fifties, students seeking transfer credits as well as adults searching for personal enrichment.

Much of the research dealing with the identification of effective teachers has proceeded on the assumption that the essential variables for study are the external correlates of teacher behavior. However,

there are still no objective criteria on the basis of which we can make clear distinctions between good and poor teachers. An alternate way of identifying effective teaching is based on the theoretical position of Arthur W. Combs and his colleagues which emphasizes the internal or phenomenological point of view. This approach focuses on the perceptual organization of the teacher as a significant means of studying effective teaching. The present research sought to explore the relationship between the perceptual organization of junior college instructors and student ratings of their effectiveness as teachers.

PROBLEM

In 1959 Combs and Snygg supported the notion that good teaching could not be consistently measured by external appraisals of traits, styles, or characteristics. Specifically, the authors stated, "the behavior we observe in others are but external manifestations of dynamic processes within the system we are observing" (p. 121). Thus, behavior observed from an external point of view is merely a symptom of the dynamic elements of the individual's perceptual organization. From the perceptions existing for any individual at the moment of his behaving. Since perceptions lie inside people, they are not available for direct measurement. Perceptions, then, need to be approached from some sort of inference. Combs (1958) has suggested that the nature of an individual's perceptual organization can be determined through inferences based upon systematic observations of behavior by trained observers. Some psychologists object to the use of inference as a scientific tool on the grounds that the process is too subjective and that the possibilities

for error and bias on the part of the trained observers introduce considerable distortions in judgment. Combs, Avila, and Purkey have responded to this criticism:

> The use of self as an instrument for making observations does indeed add a possible source of distortion not present in more mechanical ways of observing and recording behavior. This does not warrant rejection of the method, however, if the sources of error can be controlled. The making of inferences, in itself, is not unscientific; the way in which they are made and tested may be unscientific, however (1971, p. 191).

Perceptual research thus begins with careful observation. From such observation it develops inferences as to the perceptions of the subject, which inferences are checked against further observations of behavior.

PROCEDURE

The major hypothesis of the research was that there would be a significant positive relationship between student ratings of faculty effectiveness and certain aspects of perceptual organization. Specifically, the hypothesis was stated as a prediction that junior college instructors judged most effective by student ratings would:

1. Have an internal rather than external frame of reference
2. See other people as able rather than unable
3. See other people as worthy rather than unworthy
4. See themselves as with people rather than apart
5. See themselves as adequate rather than inadequate
6. See teaching as a freeing process rather than a controlling process

The subjects for this study were 32 junior college instructors employed at a public junior college located in a semi-rural North Central Florida community with an average enrollment of 1000 students. Instructors were representative of the following departments: business, communications, guided studies, health and physical education, humanities, science, social science, and vocational-technical.

Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)

Judges inferred the nature of the perceptual organization of each instructor-subject on the basis of written essays to five cards selected from Murray's (1943) Thematic Apperception Test. Cards were presented successively by means of an opaque projector. After a timed exposure of 15 minutes each card was removed from the projector and the next card was presented. Subjects were instructed to write an imaginative essay about each card first describing what was occuring at present in the scene, second telling about the events which may have led up to the present scene, and third concluding the story by telling what the outcome might be.

Scoring the Perceptual Inferences

The training of the judges took place during a two-month period in which sample essays were used to evaluate inter-judge reliability as well as the degree of understanding of the inferential technique. The theoretical position of perceptual psychology was discussed in great detail and the judges were clearly instructed as to the exact meaning of each of the six perceptual dimensions. The specified reliability was defined as having the four judges reach agreement within a two-point limit on a seven-point continuum for a minimum of 75 percent of the perceptual items. A facsimile of the perceptual rating form for recording inferences is reproduced below:

PERCEPTUAL SCORE SHEET

Rater #_____ Code _____

Date _____

D. THE TEACHER'S PERCEPTIONS OF THE HELPING RELATIONSHIP

1. Freeing - Controlling

The subject perceives the purpose of the helping relationship as one of freeing students to be more open to their experiences. He sees the task as essentially one of releasing, facilitating, assisting, and encouraging behavior. He believes that people should be free to explore and discover their own best ways.

The subject perceives the purpose of the helping relationship as one of controlling and directing people in selected, preconceived experiences. He sees the task as essentially one of manipulating behavior. He believes that people must be coerced and inhibited or rewarded and appeased in order to "shape" appropriate responses.

Freeing 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Controlling_____

The four judges in the study worked independently in making inferences based upon written essays to five TAT cards. To reduce rater fatigue a rule was established that not more than five protocols would be rated in a one-hour period of time. To counteract any possible halo effects, judges were instructed to rate all of the five TATs on one perceptual dimension before proceeding to the next dimension. To facilitate this procedure, judges were given rating sheets with only one perceptual dimension on each sheet.

Student Rating Forms

Two student rating forms were administered to the students of all the instructors participating in the study. The first instrument was the Purdue Instructor Performance Indicator (PIPI), a forced-choice rating

scale in which the student is required to make a series of choices from blocks of descriptive behavioral items. The forced-choice technique forces the rater to choose between descriptive phrases which have an equal preference index but differ at statistically significant levels in their power to discriminate between instructors who are effective versus instructors who are ineffective. The second instrument was a self-anchoring scale of teacher effectiveness called the Teacher Rating Scale (TRS). This scale, first developed by Kilpatrick and Cantril (1963), is one in which each respondent is asked to describe, in terms of his own perceptions, goals, and values, the top and bottom or anchoring points of the dimensions on which scale measurement is desired, and then to employ this self-defined continuum as a measuring device. In a previous study, Vonk (1970) modified the scale for teacher evaluation and constructed a ladder numbering each of eleven steps. Each student was encouraged to respond to the TRS in terms of how he defined good and poor teaching. Specifically, the students were asked to: (1) carefully think about their own personal definitions of the best and worst teacher for them, (2) briefly write a description of the best and worst teacher (3) imagine the best teacher at the top of the ladder and the worst teacher at the bottom of the ladder, (4) decide where their present teacher would belong on the ladder, and (5) indicate their decision by circling the appropriate number of the rating ladder.

Statistical Treatment

This study investigated the relationship between six perceptual dimensions as inferred from TAT written essays and student ratings of instructor effectiveness as determined by PIPI and TRS mean scores. In

order to determine how the number of perceptual dimensions were combined to yield a single score having the highest possible correlation with student ratings, the multiple stepwise regression analysis was selected as the most appropriate statistical device.

RESULTS

Multiple stepwise regression correlations computed between the six perceptual dimensions using ratings inferred from TAT protocols and PIPI student ratings (See Table 1) indicates that four of the dimensions produced a multiple R of .70 and accounted for 49 percent of the variation found in the criterion. These four dimensions were:

1. Teacher's perceptions of the helping relationship as freeing rather than controlling
2. Teacher's perceptions of others as able rather than unable
3. Teacher's perceptions of others as adequate rather than inadequate
4. Teacher's general frame of reference as worthy rather than unworthy.

Multiple stepwise regression correlations computed between the six perceptual dimensions using ratings inferred from TAT protocols and TRS student ratings (See Table 2) indicate that four of the dimensions produced a multiple R of .70 and accounted for 49 percent of the variation found in the criterion. These dimensions were:

1. Teacher's perceptions of the helping relationship as freeing rather than controlling
2. Teacher's perceptions of others as able rather than unable
3. Teacher's perceptions of self as adequate rather than inadequate
4. Teacher's general frame of reference as internal rather than external.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

An investigation of Tables 1 and 2 indicates that three perceptual dimensions emerge in the same relative order in terms of the relationship

between perceptual variables used as predictors and both measures of teacher effectiveness.

The strongest finding was that effective junior college instructors perceive the helping relationship as one of freeing students to explore and discover their own best ways. This finding is very much in line with the perceptaal view of teaching. According to perceptual psychology, the process of education is fundamentally a process of changing behavior, and the way to change behavior is to change perceptions. Combs and Snygg have said:

> The more intimately one perceives the relationship of concepts to self, the more certain, the more profoundly does information affect behaving. This discovery of the personal meaning of ideas, values, experiences, or the accumulated culture of the races, is the very essence of learning and the art of teaching is in helping people to make this discovery (1959, p. 385).

It would seem that teaching is not simply the imparting of information. The junior college instructor must know his subject but knowledge alone does not guarantee success. The junior college instructor must also be resourceful and flexible enough to deal with vastly different abilities, needs, and interests. Especially significant would be the instructor's versatility in matching student needs with effective means of implementing these needs. What this suggests is that junior college instructors need to be aware of students as individuals, and in creating meaningful learning environments to utilize sources, references, and experiences which best suit the needs of the particular students in his class.

Another finding in this study was that effective junior college instructors viewed others as having the capacity necessary to deal with their own problems successfully. There is inherent in this belief the

contention that the student "can" and "is able". If the community junior college is to validate the philosophy of the open door college, then an important aspect of effective teaching would be the belief that the student has the capacity to learn. This would be especially applicable to low achieveing students who may have had a long history of failure in the area of academic learning.

It was also found that instructors who saw themselves in essential ly positive ways were judged as effective instructors. These instructors felt liked, wanted, successful, and able. There is enough research in the psychological literature to suggest that liking and accepting others is predicated upon first liking and accepting oneself. Combs, Avila, and Purkey have emphasized the significance of personal adequacy as a prerequisite for effectiveness in the helping professions. "It is only when persons feel fundamentally adequate that self can be transcended and attention given to the needs of others. People who feel inadequate cannot afford the time and effort required to assist others as long as they feel deprived themselves" (1971, p. 13).

In selecting prospective candidates for a junior college teaching position, the major criteria for selection would be excellence in teaching. Combs (1965) made an interesting distinction between the purposes involved in producing a professional practitioner and a scholar. First, the education of a scholar is essentially directed toward content: that is, acquisition and understanding of information. On the other hand, the education of a practitioner stresses the effective use of knowledge. For the practitioner, application is the heart of the task. The responsibility for teacher education programs is thus the development of professional workers who

can be counted on to act upon knowledge as well as have it. Teacher education for junior college instructors might be looked at as an equation involving two essential parts: one objective, the other subjective. The objective is primarily concerned with acquisition and understanding of information. The subjective approach stresses the personal discovery of the meaning of this information from the position of the learner.

In specific terms of teaching excellence at the junior college level, effective teaching then becomes a matter of working through the environment, in essence, providing the student with greater freedom to explore and discover his maximum potential. It is not so much a matter of specific methods or techniques that is suggested. Research has shown that students can learn under a variety of methods and from a wide variety of teacher personalities. In the end result a method is only as good as the person using it. What is important is the particular way in which the instructor is able to combine his knowledge and understanding with his own unique ways of putting it into operation; it is not a matter of learning more information but achieving greater facility for using what one already knows.

TABLE 1

Multiple Stepwise Regression Correlation Between Perceptual Data as Inferred from TAT Protocols and Student Ratings as Represented by PIPI Scores

Step Number	Variable Entered	R	RSQ	Increase in RSQ	F-ratio (test R)	F-ratio (test new variable)
1	D-1 Freeing-Controlling	.446	.194		7.22*	7.22*
2	B-1 Able-Unable	.587	.345	.151	7.62**	6.67*
3	C-2 Adequate-Inadequate	.685	.469	.125	8.26**	6.58*
4	B-2 Worthy-Unworthy	.700	.490	.021	6.50**	1.12
5	C-1 With people-Apart	.701	.491	.001	5.02**	0.045
6	A-1 Internal-External	.701	.491	.000	4.03**	0.006

* Significant at the 5 percent level

** Significant at the 1 percent level

TABLE 2

Multiple Stepwise Regression Correlation Between Perceptual Data as Inferred from TAT Protocols and Student Ratings as Represented by TRS Scores

Step Number	Variable Entered	R	RSQ	Increase in RSQ	F-ratio (test R)	F-ratio (test new variable)
1	D-1 Freeing-Controlling	.551	.303		13.052**	13.052**
2	B-1 Able-Unable	.614	.377	.074	7.773**	3.435
3	C-2 Adequate-Inadequate	.684	.468	.090	8.187**	4.747*
4	A-1 Internal-External	.704	.496	.029	6.648**	1.550
5	B-2 Worthy-Unworthy	.712	.508	.012	5.371**	0.629
6	C-1 With people-Apart	.714	.510	.001	4.331**	0.079

* Significant at the 5 percent level

** Significant at the 1 percent level

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